

AVIAN FLU *Indonesia*

Improving Media Coverage of Avian Flu in Indonesia: What are the Needs?

Local media have a critical role to play as Indonesia confronts new outbreaks of avian influenza. In order to train and equip media to report effectively on AI, Internews conducted a needs assessment in March 2006 to better understand the obstacles local media face and better serve their needs. Focused group discussions were held with local print and broadcast journalists in Jakarta. In addition, key informant interviews were held in Jakarta with representatives of WHO and the Ministries of Agriculture and Health.

KEY FINDINGS

Discussions with journalists revealed that they face a number of obstacles in reporting on avian flu, including:

- Limited access to reliable information
- Personal safety issues when reporting in the field
- Lack of guidance on the ethics of covering AI issue
- Complexity of the issue (eg. impact on economy)
- Language barriers (ie. information and sources not Bahasa)
- Reality of deadlines, limited space, and TV ratings
- Lack of specialized health journalists

Journalists suggested the following types of assistance are needed:

- Technical guidance on safety precautions, such as masks, gloves to wear, etc.
- Experts from other countries that have experienced AI longer than Indonesia to share their knowledge and experience
- A handbook on covering AI with guidance on the ethics, including a code of conduct



Internews trainee Asep Furqon (right) of GIGA FM, together with trainer Sonny Inbaraj (center), interview a chicken seller at the Sukahaji bird market in Bandung, West Java.

- Better information from the authorities
- A policy on media treatment of victims' families

The health experts interviewed identified the following needs:

- Better fact checking by the media
- More ethical treatment of AI victims and families
- Training for the local media, ideally regional
- More emphasis on hygiene practices like hand washing rather than so much discussion about Tamiflu and vaccines
- Education of journalists on the basics of avian influenza

INTERNEWS' RESPONSE

As part of our work to address these needs, Internews, with support from UNICEF, has launched workshops in six regions of Indonesia. The workshops provide journalists with the skills to report accurately and effectively as well as a thorough understanding of avian flu and its potential threats. Discussions include a focus on avoiding sensationalist headlines, safety issues for journalists when covering avian flu, responsibility in reporting on avian flu and the ethical concerns when reporting stories involving children.